

Stalking protection order (SPO) triage process

Implementing a triage process for assessing stalking protection order (SPO) applications to improve efficiency and enhance victim safety.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Diversion
Topic	Stalking and harassment Offender management
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Region	North West
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Health services
Stage of Implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	December 2024
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	General public
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Aim

The aim of the triage process is to:

- utilise SPOs
- provide victims with safety and access to support services
- risk manage offenders who engage in stalking behaviour

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the SPO triage process are to:

- increase the tactical use of SPOs
- improve victim safety
- improve victim satisfaction towards policing and the criminal justice system

Description

Cheshire Constabulary has a multi-agency stalking intervention programme (MASIP), also known as the harm reduction unit (HRU). The HRU is part of the force's multi-agency stalking risk management service. While Cheshire Constabulary had a specialist provision, it was identified that their number of SPOs was not as high compared to other forces as expected. An in-person review meeting was held to scrutinise SPO applications, to identify potential patterns where SPOs were applied for and granted by courts. The meeting was attended by the:

- HRU
- HRU business support officer
- legal services
- stalking lead (detective chief inspector)

The review identified that Cheshire Constabulary had a relatively high conviction and charge rate for stalking, which often resulted in restraining orders. It was also noted that the force, in the majority of cases, were granting full rather than interim SPOs. Officers would occasionally complete an SPO application which would be authorised by a superintendent. If points within the application required clarification, this would cause delays to the granting of the SPO.

In response, Cheshire Constabulary implemented a SPO triage form. The Microsoft form is hosted on an internal SharePoint and can be accessed anytime via the force's intranet. The form contains fields for:

- the substantive investigation (if applicable)
- the parties involved
- whether there are any known mental health issues
- whether there are any conditions or legal frameworks in place and if so – why these are not sufficient to manage risk
- a short summary of the case
- proposed conditions or requirements
- whether the respondent is under the age of 18 – if so the force directs the user to the youth justice service
- the complainant's views about the SPO – if this information is unavailable, the officer can email HRU or legal services directly

Once the form has been completed, Power Automate sends an email to legal services and the HRU. Legal services can generate an internal case and can advise the officer in charge (OIC) whether to seek further clarification or proceed with the application. The authorising officers therefore have reassurance that the SPO application has received some legal scrutiny.

To support implementation, ten five-minute "how to" short reel videos were produced and are hosted on a dedicated page on the force's intranet. The videos guide officers through each stage of applying for an SPO and how to use the force systems. Additional in-person training has been delivered to all frontline officers, supervisors and investigators during scheduled training days by specialist HRU officers.

There has been no cost to the development and the implementation of the SPO triage process.

Overall impact

A baseline assessment revealed that on average, prior to December 2024, an SPO was being granted once every 40 days. Since the implementation of the triage process, the majority of interim and SPOs are obtained at a rate of one every five to six days.

The force has seen an increase in:

- victim satisfaction
- the use of monitored GPS victim proximity tagging
- stalker therapeutic interventions
- assessments with health care professionals

Feedback from officers indicates that the SPO triage process is simpler, more efficient and less burdensome.

Learning

- The in-person meeting was essential for collaboration and for each team to understand the competing demands and shared goals.
- There has been an increase demand on legal services. The input from legal services will help the force to make more informed decision about resources and governance of the work of the team.
- This approach has led to the local magistracy requesting training from specialist services, to increase their awareness and understanding about SPOs.
- A challenge during implementation was the testing and refinement of the electronic form, to ensure Power Automate generated an email to legal services.

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